CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

Elders and Messengers

OF THE

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Aulcester*, *Bourton*, *Birmingham*, *Bromsgrove*, *Bridgenorth*, *Bewdley*, *Leominster*, *Pershore*, *Tewkesbury*, *Bengworth*, *Upton*, and *Warwick*, (having also received Letters from *Sutton*, *Middleton*, and *Hooknorton*,) met in ASSOCIATION at *Worcester*, the 9th and 10th of *June*, 1767; maintaining the great Doctrines of *Three equal Persons in the Godhead*; *eternal* and *personal Election*; *original Sin*; *particular Redemption*; *free Justification* by *the imputed Righteousness of Christ*; *efficacious Grace in Regeneration*; and *final Perseverance of the Saints*.

To the Churches they represent, wish *Grace*, and *Peace may be multiplied through the knowledge of God*, and our *Saviour Jesus Christ*.

Dear Brethren, and Beloved in our Lord,

IT may be convenient to inform you, that as by the *Kindness* of Providence the Ministers, and Messengers from the Churches in this Association came hither in Safety; we have not only had the pleasing Sight of each other; but *comfortable* Seasons both in Prayer, and hearing the Word of God. As

the annual Aſſembling of the Churches in Aſſociation not only affords good People an Opportunity of ſeeing one another for the mutual Expreſſion, and Encreaſe of *Chriſtian* Love; but furniſhes them with Seaſons of Prayer, and ſtriving together for the *Faith of the Goſpel*; by publiſhing the *glad* Tidings thereof, to eſtabliſh Men's Minds in a *ſteady* Belief of the Truth, and Oppoſition to Error; therefore we can't but think it is right to encourage, and continue a Meeting ſo *evidently* calculated for the *Glory of God*, and the *Benefit of Men*; for the *Defence of the Goſpel*, and *Service of the Churches*; in communicating to them ſuch Advice as may be moſt ſuited to their Circumſtances.

Here perhaps you will enquire in what Situation, and Circumſtances the Churches of Jeſus are; as whether they have continued to walk cloſely with God, and have enjoyed much of his Preſence; have been enlarged, and in Peace with one another, or the contrary:—To this we anſwer, by the Letters received it does not appear that any of the Churches we repreſent have in a particular manner declined from the Principles of Truth, or from a godly Life, and Converſation. One or two Churches being excepted, the reſt are in Peace, and Harmony among themſelves are provided with *evangelic* Miniſters, by whom the Word, and Ordinances of the Lord are *conſtantly* and *faithfully* diſpenſed; and their Labours in the Vineyard have not been *altogether* unſucceſsful; for moſt of the Churches have had *ſome* Encreaſe of Members this Year; ſo that the deceaſed are not equal in number to them which have been added. At the ſame time we muſt not conceal from you the Complaints made concerning a Want of more Zeal for the Honor of God, and a more ſenſible Enjoyment of his Favor in Communion with him; and

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one, or two Churches Uneaſineſs has ariſen between Brethren, ſo that we may ſay with Deborah, *for the Diviſions of Reuben there were* great *Thoughts* of *Heart.* — By this Account it appears that the Churches are not over run with *Tares*, or the Prevalence of *falſe* Doctrine; have not defiled their Garments with *licentious* Lives; are not deſtitute of *Zion*'s Proviſion; nor are they wounded with Breaches which cannot be made up: They have alſo had ſome Diſplays of *divine* Power among 'em, as appears by their Encreaſe. Theſe Things ſhould be Cauſe of Comfort to your Souls; and excite your Gratitude to God who has deſigned; to Chriſt who has wrought out; and to the Holy Spirit who has applied to many Sons, and Daughters of Adam the great Salvation revealed in the Goſpel.

If now you expect from us ſome Advice adapted to the preſent State of Affairs; we might endeavour, with the Apoſtle Peter, *to ſtir up your pure Minds by way of Remembrance*, deſiring you to recollect the *excellent* Counſels which have been given in former Letters of this Kind: But if you ſtill think it needful that we offer our preſent Thoughts, we hope you will receive them with Gravity, and Attention; likewiſe with Prayers to the God of all Grace, that you may be able to act according to them; then will you have Cauſe to rejoice in receiving, and we in giving the following Directions; (*Viz.*)

That you carefully attend to the Arguments which demonſtrate the Being of God; then frequently with Serioufneſs contemplate the great Jehovah both in his natural, and moral Perfections; that ye may not like the Fool, like the brutiſh, or churliſh Man, ſay in your Hearts *there is no God*; nor like the Samaritans worſhip *ye know not what*; but be of them who *know the Name of the Lord, and put their Truſt in him*;

who *love* and *fear* him; who hold him in the *higheſt* Eſteem, and chooſe him as the *Portion of their Souls.* — We entreat you to conſider Chriſt Jeſus the *high Prieſt*, and *Apoſtle* of *our Fellowſhip*; contemplate him in his divine and human Nature; in his glorious Perſon, Offices, and Bleſſings; that you may ſee more of his Worth, and Suitableneſs to your Caſe; that you may think his *Price is above Rubies*; *and* that *all Things which may* be *deſired are not to be compared to him*, in *whom are hid all the Treaſures* of *Wiſdom*, and *Knowledge*; for *thus to know the true God, and Jeſus Chriſt his Son is eternal Life.* We beſeech you not to grieve the Spirit of God, by indulging vain Thoughts, and carnal Affections; but that you would conſider he is of a divine Nature, and therefore beware that you offend him not, leſt God for a Time *caſt you away* from *his Preſence*, and *take his holy Spirit from you.*

We commend the holy Scriptures to your frequent, and ſerious Attention; that when you are acquainted with the Evidences by which they appear to be of divine Inſpiration, you may be able to anſwer the Objections of Infidels, and treat with Contempt the Sneers of Cavillers. By frequently conſidering the Oracles of God you will probably be enabled to form a good Judgment as to the whole Syſtem of Divinity; ſo that you may diſtinguiſh Truth from Falſehood, in thoſe Things about which Proteſtants themſelves diſagree; and chooſing the good old Way, may walk in the *Path of the Juſt*, *which* is *as the Light that ſhineth more and more to the perfect Day.* By being well acquainted with the Scriptures you will alſo be the better prepared to attend the Labours of your Miniſters with Judgment, and Edification; for Want of this many hear the Word without being able to diſcern whether the Diſcourſe, and Reaſoning of

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Miniſters be founded on Truth, or not; and thus are liable to be carried to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine; as well as to be taken by every Temptation of Satan.

To read the Scriptures will avail little, unleſs you are ſolicitous to cleanſe your Ways according to the Precepts, and Doctrines thereof; which teach Men that *denying all Impiety, and Wordly Luſts, they ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World:* Or in other Words, that *they do Juſtice, love Mercy, and walk humbly with God.* Let no Man therefore have Cauſe to ſay that you have wrong'd him; or that you have impoſed on him by lying, and deceitful Words; let no one ſay you have been oppreſſive, and cruel; but as the elect, and beloved of God put on Bowels of *Compaſſion*, and *Tenderneſs*; viſit the ſick, and impriſoned; lend to the needy, and give to the poor; ſo ſhall ye have Treaſures in Heaven which Thieves can't break thro' and ſteal. Take heed, and beware of Covetouſneſs, or a graſping deſire after the Things of this Life, which oft leads Men into Snares. A little which a righteous Man hath is better than the Riches of many wicked; having therefore Food, and Raiment be therewith content; that, in Regard to earthly Poſſeſſions, and ſenſual Gratifications, your Moderation may be known to all Men; and you may be preſerv'd in Sanctification, and Honor, as becomes them who deſire to be Veſſels made meet for the Maſters Uſe.—To theſe good Practices we apprehend a ſteady Attachment to the Doctrines of the Goſpel will greatly contribute, becauſe they are according to Godlineſs, teaching Men to be pure in Heart, and Life; therefore we entreat your ſteady Adherence to the Form of ſound Words, or the Faith once delivered to the Saints; for it is an old, but true Obſervation, that when Perſons become lax

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in their Sentiments, they generally grow looſe in their Lives.

We deſire you will have a due Regard to the Seaſons of divine Worſhip in their weekly Returns; that you will preſent yourſelves before the Lord from a Senſe of his Mercies to you, and your Obligations to him; that in going to the Houſe of God you will aim at his Honor, and your Souls Edification. Hear your Miniſters with Attention, and Judgment, deſiring to improve by their Labours; but watch not with a critical Eye to find Imperfections; remember that Charity covereth a Multitude of Faults; and the Apoſtles themſelves ſaid, *Brethren pray for us.* —We hope you will not make, or foment Differences; but diſcountenance, and ſuppreſs them: For if you would conſtrain a departing Saviour to abide with you, it is needful that you endeavour to preſerve the Unity of the Spirit in the Bonds of Peace. This Exhortation may eſpecially refer to ſuch Churches as have in View the Choice of Miniſters; in this Situation ſee that you fall not out by the Way; for Miniſters were intended to be as Stars, that is, for the Uſe, and Ornament of the Church; but not to be the Occaſion of Animoſity among Brethren, and of Diviſions in the Houſe of God. Oh Brethren, ſtrive to avoid theſe Things!

We entreat you to manifeſt a tender Concern for the Welfare of your Children, and Servants; give them proper Inſtructions as to the Doctrines, and Duties of Religion; theſe Inſtructions ſupport by a ſuitable Example, and fervent Prayers with, and for your Families. Be not Strangers to your Cloſets, but oft preſent yourſelves there before him who ſees in ſecret, and will reward you openly. See that ye be ſincere, fervent, and ſpiritual in all you do; and whatever you do, whether in Word, or Deed, let it be with

Faith,

Faith, and in the Name of Chriſt, without whom we can do nothing.—— Some of our Brethren think the preſent Dearneſs of Proviſions, and the Diſtreſs of many thouſands in the Land on Account thereof deſerve your Regard; and that theſe Circumſtances, together with the Prevalence of Sin, are a juſt Cauſe why the Churches ſhould obſerve Days of Faſting, and Prayer, wherein to ſeek the Lord in behalf of the Nation; that Matters may be in a better Situation than they are at preſent.

To convince you of the Importance of theſe Directions, and that you ſhould ſincerely, and fervently deſire to comply with them, pleaſe to conſider that you dwell in the *Valley of Viſion*, or *Land of Light*, where the Scriptures, as a Word of Salvation, have long been enjoy'd; you dwell alſo in a Land of Liberty, where you are neither perſecuted, or reſtrained, as your Forefathers were; but are allowed to examine Matters, and Judge for yourſelves; uſe not this Freedom as a Cloak, or Cover to Wickedneſs; but ſtand faſt in the Liberty wherewith Chriſt has made you free, and be not entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage. Conſider the Welfare of your own Souls; the Peace of your Conſciences; the Comfort, and Reputation of the Churches of Jeſus; and finally the Glory of God: If theſe Conſiderations have any Weight with you, we perſuade ourſelves ye will then not only read, but pray over this Letter. Finally Brethren, farewel, be perfect, be of good Comfort, be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love, and Peace ſhall be with you; which is the ſincere, and fervent Deſire of your Brethren, and Servants in Chriſt.

Sign'd, 10th of *June*, 1767, in behalf of the whole Aſſembly, by the Moderator

JAMES TURNER.

P. S. We desire that Prayer-Meetings may be carefully attended; and in a special manner we commend to the Churches of this Association the spending an hour, or an hour and half in Prayer, every Friday-Evening, beginning at 7 o'Clock, for the Revival of God's Work; and pouring down his Spirit on the Churches, especially the associated Ones.

BREVIATES.

The Messengers being met Tuesday Evening, some time was spent in Prayer; the Letters from the Churches being read, and their Contents considered, *Brother Poynting* was desired to draw up the Circular Letter.

The public Meeting on Wednesday was opened with Prayer by *Brother Skinner*, and *Brother Butterworth*; then *Brother Beddome* preached from *Luke* xxiv. 29. then *Brother Thomas* pray'd, and *Brother Ash* preach'd from *Luke* x. 11. *Brother Jones* concluded in Prayer.

This Year added by Baptism — —	52
Removed by Death — —	23
Encrease — — —	29

Next Association to be at *Bromsgrove*; put up at the *Crown*. To meet Tuesday Evening in the Whitsun-Week. *Brother Hayden*, and *Brother Poynting* to preach; in Case of Failure of either, *Brother Whitmore*. *N. B.* Our Friends at *Bromsgrove* desire the Service on Wednesday may be divided into two Parts (*viz.*) from 10 to 12 o'Clock in the Morning, and from 2 till 4 in the Afternoon.

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WORCESTER: Printed by R. Lewis.